

# *Student Perceptions of the Case Method in Educational Psychology and Its Impact on Teaching and Learning*

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*The case method enjoys a long tradition in fields such as medicine, law, and business, but is a relatively novel method in teacher education programs. The current study adds to the growing number of studies examining the effects of case-based instruction on students' cognition, affect, and/or behavior. This study specifically examined students' understanding of the purpose of the case method and the impact of the case method on students' changing views of teaching and learning. Results of survey responses, in-depth interviews, and student essays suggest that students "get" the case method and that students leave the course with a more integrated view of teaching and learning.*

**Keywords:** case method, instructional strategies, constructivism, student perceptions, educational psychology

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century marks a critical time for education and educational psychology faculty. It is essential that teacher education programs clearly articulate the mission and the objectives of teacher education and engage in rigorous inquiry demonstrating their effectiveness (Eisenhart & Towne, 2003). Teacher education programs, like other professional degree programs, face the challenge of demonstrating the relevance of empirical theories provided in the college classroom to everyday practice in the "real world." Courses in teacher education and educational psychology provide students with a breadth of concepts, theory, and research, but often in a decontextualized way (Anderson, Blumenfeld, Pintrich, Marx, & Peterson, 1995). Particularly in introductory courses, there is a wealth of information on an array of topics, all of which can potentially assist teachers in their practices. However, the pressure to cover material coupled with a traditional lecture or whole class discussion approach can prevent future teachers from actively connecting the theories and concepts taught to practice (Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000). The case method represents an instructional approach that can assist faculty in education to better meet some of their goals in this area.

The case method, which attempts to bridge the chasm between theory and practice, is an instructional technique widely used in business, nursing, and law. Professional schools find that cases provide contexts in which theories and concepts can be tested, discussed, applied or challenged. Cases are defined differently across and within disciplines. Generally speaking, a case is any situation or set of situations in which a person

or persons are engaged in an activity that reflects real-life practice in a particular domain (Merseeth, 1996). In education settings, cases can come in the form of dilemmas written from the perspective of a teacher, videotaped instructional sessions, or hypothetical scenarios where multiple stakeholders wrestle with a teaching and learning dilemma. The case itself is not an instructional technique, but rather the case sets the stage for peer discussion and case analysis. The case method approach should reflect an engaged learning environment where students present their perspectives, hear the perspectives of their peers, and apply the theories covered in class (Levin, 1999).

The case method is not, however, simply a tool to prove that academia is relevant to practitioners. This method also fosters student reflection on preconceived notions and promotes changes in thinking via a constructivist approach to learning (Bolt, 1998). Engaging in debate and dialogue with their peers about a situational problem promotes critical thinking in students (Harrington, Quinn-Leering & Hodson, 1996; Moje & Wade, 1997; Sudzina, 1997). An effective case discussion leader elicits multiple perspectives and solutions, while making reference to the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the case. The discussion occurs mainly among the students, with the facilitator guiding, summarizing, and reflecting on the objectives of instruction throughout (Levin, 1999).

Much of the research on the case method in education focuses narrowly on "how best to" teach using cases or studying the impact of case-based instruction on college students' thinking, reasoning,

and in a few cases their practice. Data for these studies come mainly from examining student case analyses or student generated cases. While these are important areas of inquiry, it is possible that the results reflect improvement in student mastery of instructor requirements and not necessarily true growth in cognition, reflection, and reasoning. Students are likely to improve in the quality of their written case analyses over the course of the semester based on instructor feedback, clarity of instructor expectations for assignments, and experiences working with cases. If it is purported that the case method directly or indirectly impacts teacher preparation and effectiveness in the classroom, as has been asserted in other professional fields, then research needs to assess the extent to which exposure and engagement in the case method extends beyond the students' abilities to adequately complete a case analysis of a teaching dilemma (Allen, 1995).

The current study addresses these limitations by incorporating multiple methodologies, including interviews, student perception surveys, and student written products to better understand how undergraduate students view the role of the case method for learning educational psychology.

### ***Research on the Case Method in Teaching Education***

Researchers have examined a number of essential elements for effective case method instruction (Levin, 1999; Lundeberg & Scheurman, 1997). In addition to studying the procedural aspects of the case method, there is a growing body of research that examines the impact of the case method on student outcomes (Lundeberg, Levin, & Harrington, 1999). In a comprehensive review of research on the case method in teacher education, Smith (2005) found three categories of outcomes measured, including changes in students' cognition, reflection, and pedagogical knowledge.

The case-method has been touted as an instructional approach that challenges teacher education students' thinking and their abilities to transfer what they are learning to the classroom setting. Several studies have examined students' cognitive growth throughout a semester-long course that used the case method as the primary pedagogical approach (Bolt, 1998; Harrington, 1995; Lundeberg & Fawyer, 1994; Powell, 2000). These studies on cognitive change shared some common approaches. Each study employed multiple qualitative methods to qualify or quantify

changes, as evidenced in students' written analysis of cases, from the beginning to the end of a semester.

Many courses and programs state that students will improve their skills in reflection as a result of taking a course or graduating from a teacher education program. Researchers have found that case method instruction can help students' become more reflective thinkers by encouraging them to consider critically the decisions of actors in a case and use evidence (theory, data, or feedback) to support their assumptions about the case. (Merseth, 1996). For example, Hewitt, Pedretti, Bencze, Dale Vaillancourt, and Yoon (2003) examined elementary education students' conceptions of reflection while engaged in a videocase lesson. Harrington, Quinn-Leering, and Hodson (1996) studied 21 elementary education students' written case analyses for evidence of critical reflection. Reichelt's (2000) studied how the case-method affected 14 secondary foreign language students' reflection, decision-making, and problem-solving abilities. These studies all revealed moderate changes in the reflective practices of the students at the end of the respective courses.

Research has also been conducted on the impact of the case method on students' ability to identify effective instructional practices and apply course content. Manoucherhri and Enderson (2003) found that the case-method instruction helped 50 secondary mathematics educators gain better pedagogical knowledge, by "creating dissonance in participants' thinking about teaching and what they viewed as valuable knowledge for successful teaching (p. 129). Andrews (2002) looked at how 40 general education students (elementary and secondary) applied principles and concepts of inclusion following exposure to the case-method. Others have examined the extent to which the case method influences student reflection around issues of diversity (Guillaume, Zuniga-Hill, & Yee, 1995; LaFramboise & Griffith, 1997).

### ***Case Method Instruction in an Educational Psychology Course***

The current study was conducted in an introductory educational psychology course at a four-year public university in the Northeast. The course was held in a lecture hall and met once a week for three hours. Although this was not the ideal setting for a course that heavily incorporates case discussions, the case methodology was the prominent instructional approach in the class. In

total, there were eight case discussions. Two of the cases were teacher-in-action cases, where the focus was on description and discussion of effective instructional practices. The six teacher dilemma cases portrayed situations where a teacher was confronted with a difficult decision (Silverman, Welty, & Lyon, 1996). Students prepared a case outline prior to each case discussion. The case discussions were led by the first author and lasted for approximately one hour. The discussions followed a similar pattern of first discussing the problem from the perspective of the teacher, then examining things that the teacher could not see. This aspect was called "problem identification." During this time, concepts and theories from the textbook were incorporated into the discussion by the students and/or the instructor. The next part of the case discussion focused on identifying all possible solutions and once again linking those solutions to concepts, theories and research in educational psychology. Finally, instructor and students discussed the benefits and consequences associated with each solution. Students also completed a full case analysis of two of the dilemma cases.

In addition to using the case method as a leading instructional approach, the course asked students to identify their philosophy of teaching and learning several weeks into the semester and again at the end of the semester. Students were asked to incorporate information from the cases as well as the text chapters covered to that point to support their views. At the end of the semester, they were expected to reflect on their original view and describe any modifications or affirmations that occurred, using the cases and text to support their "revised" views of teaching and learning.

The purpose of the current study was to understand how undergraduate students in an educational psychology course thought about the case method and to examine the extent to which their experiences with the case method impacted their "philosophy" of teaching and learning. The following research questions guided the study.

- 1) What are students' perceptions of the purposes of the case method?
- 2) In what ways has the case method affected students' views of teaching and learning?

## METHOD

### *Participants*

Participants in the study included 65 undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory educational psychology course at a four-year public university in the Northeast. Over 80% of the students in the course were education minors and the majority indicated a desire to either become a teacher or work in the field of education. Seventy percent of the students were female. Ninety percent of the students were European American, 8% were African American and one student in the course was Asian. Of the 20 students whose teaching and learning essays were selected for analysis, 17 completed both essays. Twelve of these students were female and five were male. One selected female participant was African-American and the remaining selected students were European American. Sixteen students agreed to participate in interviews.

### *Measures and Analysis*

*Case method survey.* The *Case Method Survey* is a researcher-developed instrument used for diagnostic purposes to examine three aspects of students' perceptions of the case method. This survey has been administered in multiple classes over multiple semesters and items have been revised for clarity and purpose. Eight survey items measure students' perceptions of the purpose and function of the case method. Sample items in this category include, "Case discussions help me see perspectives that I would not have thought of," and "Cases used in class reflect real classroom situations." Two items measure students' perceptions of how the case method impacts teaching and learning. For example, "The case method has positively changed how I view teaching." The remaining items have to do with students' perceptions about specific aspects of the case method; e.g., "Completing the case outline helps me prepare for case discussions." Students scored each statement on a five-point Likert scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. (scoring on five negatively worded items was reversed prior to descriptive analysis). At the end of the survey, there was an open-ended question that asked students to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the case method as used in the course. Students completed the survey midway through the course and at the end of the semester. Analysis of results revealed no differences between

the mid-term and final surveys. Therefore, only the final survey results are reported here. Internal consistency for the entire survey was adequate (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .76$ ).

*Interviews.* The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was developed by the authors investigate to more deeply the two research questions for this study, regarding students' perceptions of the purpose of using cases in educational psychology and how and in what ways the case method influenced student learning. Towards the end of the course, students were invited to participate in one-on-one interviews. Sixteen students participated in the interview process.

Each interview was conducted by the second author. She followed the guidelines developed by Claesson and Brice (1989): (a) the same issues or questions were covered in all interviews; (b) the order of the questions were fitted to the individual; (c) individual perspectives and experiences were allowed to emerge; and (d) what participants considered important issues was not presupposed. Spontaneous, context-based follow-up questions to probe, clarify, and interpret information were used throughout. Each interview was audiotaped and lasted from 15 to 20 minutes.

Audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Units of analysis were then identified for each interview based on the three research questions guiding the study. Each unit was then coded for emerging themes. A cross-case analysis was performed to identify aggregate themes for all participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using categories developed by Elliot (1993), a *general finding* was reserved for codes found in virtually in all participants' transcripts. A *typical finding* was recorded when approximately half of the participants' codes reflected synonymous sentiments and a *variant finding* indicated that only one or a few participants reported a sentiment. Preliminary content analysis of ten interview transcripts reached saturation. The remaining six transcripts were analyzed for deviations from the findings, but none were found. Thus, the final analyses reported here are based on the results of ten interviews.

*Teaching and learning essays.* Students in the course completed two drafts of a paper describing their views of teaching and learning, once at the end of the first month of class and again at end of

the semester. In both essays, students included their personal approaches to teaching and learning and supported their stated views with evidence from the textbook (Slavin, 2003), case studies used in the course (Silverman et al., 1996), and other material presented in the course. The second draft overtly asked students to reflect on the extent to which, if at all, their views had changed over the semester and to discuss their reasons or rationale for any changes.

The analysis of student work presented here focuses on two specific components of the second essays. The authors independently identified units of analysis for text that (a) talked explicitly about the content changes in views of teaching and learning, and (b) referred to cases to support their revised views of teaching and learning. Discrepancies between the researchers on the units of analysis were resolved via consensus. Each researcher proceeded to identify content for each units of analysis, without interpretation. At this stage of the analysis, the goal was to label the concepts, theories, and practices that defined student views of teaching and learning. Once the codes were created for each participant, researchers compared their respective codes. The final aspect of examining the analysis involved a cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Following Elliot's (1993) cross-case categories, researchers were interested in gleaning patterns at the aggregate, rather than the individual level.

## RESULTS

### *Purposes of the Case Method*

The first research question focused on students' perceptions of the case method and specifically the ways in which they understood the purposes and processes of the case method. Descriptive data from the survey combined with themes gleaned from the interviews were used to address this question.

A major purpose of the case method is for students to gain an appreciation for multiple perspectives. According to Table 1, students reported that the case discussions provided them with other perspectives they would not originally have thought of ( $m = 4.27$ ). This item was the highest scored item on the survey. Another question about multiple perspectives received strong support as well, as students indicated that they learned from their classmates ( $m = 3.73$ ).

TABLE 1

## MEANS AND PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE WITH EACH ITEM

Survey Item	Item Mean	% Agree	% Strongly Agree
I prefer direct instruction (lecture) to the case method. (R)*	3.27	41.2	7.8
Case discussions help me see perspectives that I would not have thought of.	4.27	49.0	41.2
It is difficult to connect concepts from the text to the cases. (R)	3.67	52.9	13.7
The case method has positively changed how I view teaching.	3.67	37.3	45.1
Cases used in class reflect real classroom situations.	4.02	51.0	27.5
Theories covered in class/text are not applicable to actual classroom teaching situations. (R)	4.07	45.1	35.3
Completing the case outline helps me prepare for the case discussion.	3.98	54.9	25.5
Case discussion makes me cognitively more engaged.	4.00	56.9	23.5
Feedback on the initial case analyses is helpful for improving the quality of my case analyses.	4.16	58.8	31.4
I participate more in this class than my other classes.	3.08	15.7	13.7
I don't like cases because they are quite ambiguous and difficult to analyze. (R)	3.63	51.0	15.7
Using cases helped me understand the material (theories and concepts) presented in the class and in the Slavin text.	3.69	54.9	11.8
I learned from other students when we discussed cases in small groups.	3.73	45.1	21.6
I feel I am more capable of tackling real life classroom problems now than before I took this course.	3.92	56.9	21.6
I feel I didn't get much from case discussions and analyses. Time can be spent more efficiently with other teaching methods, covering more materials (R).	3.96	43.1	31.4

\*Note: Item means and frequencies are reported after negative items (R) were reversed scored.

The interview results supported these findings from the survey. Appreciation for multiple perspectives emerged as a *typical* theme in the interview analysis. Six of ten students described how they gained a better sense of education and

educational psychology by listening to peers' descriptions of the problems and solutions in various cases. For example, a female student stated, "I think the cases provide situations that let you learn different objectives, solutions, or a

viewpoint on different cases that you wouldn't necessarily learn in classes regularly."

A second purpose, linking theories in college courses to elementary or secondary classroom practice, was also identified as a strength of the case method. The finding emerged as a *general* theme in the interview analysis. All ten students reported that participating in the case method helped them connect information learned in the class and textbook to real classroom experiences. For example, a female student stated, "I think it (case method) is a good way to connect the terms and different concepts and theories with actual real life situations. You are able to get a better understanding of what concepts are and how to approach them." With similar language, but referring specifically to connecting material in the course textbook to teaching, a male student said,

I think if you read the textbook you get an understanding of what they are saying, but not really how to apply them. But the case method helps you understand how to apply them and what situations you would apply them in.

Scores on the survey support this finding among the entire class. Students mostly agreed that the cases reflected "real life" situations ( $m = 4.02$ ) and many felt more comfortable that they could "tackle real life issues in the classroom" ( $m = 3.97$ ) than they had felt prior to taking this case-based course in educational psychology. A related *general* theme that emerged in the teaching and learning analysis involved the transfer of knowledge. Students' noted that the cases were realistic and they believed that reflecting on the actors in the cases could potentially help them in future teaching situations.

A final purpose of the case method is to promote critical thinking and reflection via social learning opportunities. Students endorsed the value of case discussions in promoting critical thinking and reported being engaged during case discussions ( $m = 4.00$ ). The interviews supported the relatively high mean score on this item as engagement emerged as *typical* interview theme.

### ***Impact on Students' Views of Teaching and Learning***

The second research question addressed the extent to which students' views on teaching and learning were modified following case-based

instruction in this educational psychology course. The major finding was that students presented a more integrated view of teaching and learning that included a growing appreciation for balancing constructivist teaching and direct instruction.

Student essays consistently reflected a broadening of their view of teaching and learning. For example, one student noted how his earlier view was limited to his assumptions around students' responsibilities for learning,

I realized that the teacher was also very important in the learning of material. In my previous view, I had made no point to justify the fact that the teacher played an important role in learning as well as the student.

Integrated views also reflected a sense that particular concepts or instructional strategies were more complex than presented in the textbook. The following two quotes exemplify this finding,

The biggest change from my view on direct instruction is to keep most of the emphasis on reviewing prerequisites and conducting learning probes because I believe most of the students' success will come from these two steps.

The second quote specifically mentions how a student felt that her experiences with cases led her to question her assumptions about cooperative learning and classroom management.

Through the case studies, I have learned that cooperative learning is not suitable for certain subjects and that direct instruction can be just as successful if used correctly. I also realized that other elements such as motivation, praise, and behavior all tie in to making a classroom successful.

Some students reported that their views generally remained the same throughout the semester. A *typical* theme, reaffirmation of previous beliefs, reflected student consistency in their views from their original essays. However, each student who indicated this belief also mentioned areas where changes or an expansion in their thinking occurred. For example,

After a full semester of classroom discussion, reading case studies, and information from Slavin (the textbook author), I have decided that the three

methods/theories I chose earlier still suit me quite well with a few exceptions.

A few students were still discovering their philosophies on teaching and learning and indicated that their views were not fully articulated at the beginning of the course. One student exemplified this *variant* theme, an evolving view of teaching and learning,

At the beginning of this semester I had no idea what being a teacher entailed. I knew from the perspective of a student. What it took to be a student and how I liked to be taught or learn. During the few months that have passed I have learned an enormous amount of what it takes to be a teacher. Within my first views of teaching essay I really was not straight-forward about my view. This is due to the fact that I was not even sure of my view. I am still a little leery, because I know there is still a lot more for me to learn to be an astonishing teacher.

The quote above is an important insight for the student. Some students perceive that because they have been a student all their lives, being a teacher is not difficult. Over the course of the semester, the student came to realize that “expert student equals expert teacher” is a fallacy. The emergent sense of uncertainty expressed by the student is a healthy sign of personal and professional growth.

Their essays revealed that the majority of students’ views reflected a balanced instructional approach, as they described moving from a more traditional instructional approach at the beginning of the course toward an appreciation for the role of constructivism. They also described a growing awareness of both the challenges of facilitating cooperative learning and discussions in the classroom and the potential these instructional methods held for engaged learning. For instance, many students challenged the efficacy of Ken Kelly, a teacher in one of the cases who relied primarily on lectures in a social studies class. While he attempted to engage his students in a discussion on economics, a majority of the teaching and learning essays questioned his lack of intention, lack of stated objectives, and the poor use of facilitation skills he presented.

Slightly over 82% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the case method positively influenced their views of teaching and learning. In their final essays, students referenced the cases as examples

or evidence to substantiate the conceptual framework of their views of teaching and learning. The negatively worded survey item, which was reversed scored for analysis, “I prefer direct instruction to the case method,” was 3.27 on the five-point Likert scale. The interviews substantiate this preference for case method instruction, as students juxtaposed the lack of engagement during lectures with the active environment of the case discussion. One student describes this preference,

Me personally, I don’t like lecturing. I don’t like just sitting there taking notes all the time. I think it (case method) keeps me more engaged. You get more ideas that way; because you are listening to everyone’s ideas and it sticks with you in class and stuff. I always remember it better.

In sum, the results of this study suggest that students understood the various purposes of the case method and that their views of teaching and learning reflected a more integrated perspective at the end of the semester. Following case method instruction, students’ views of teaching and learning were more balanced in terms of instructional approaches.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the current study add to the growing research on the impact of the case method on student outcomes and provides insight for incorporating the case method into an educational psychology course. Students in such courses are engaged in learning material that has a reputation for being marginally relevant to future educators. Part of this reputation stems from the fact that educational psychology is lumped in with “research and theory,” not practice, and has often been presented in a decontextualized manner (Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000). Instead of educational psychology courses, preservice teachers may look to their methods courses, courses in curriculum and instruction or student teaching for the “relevant” concepts and experiences in teacher education. The results of this study point to the important role of cases in helping students engage and connect with concepts and theories in educational psychology in meaningful ways.

In this course, the case method demonstrated efficacy in bridging the theory-practice gap. Case outlines and discussions helped students to apply theories and concepts covered in class to vicarious

teaching and learning experiences. The dilemma cases particularly intrigued students and promoted intense debates about appropriate solutions to particular situations. These discussions provided an opportunity for students to try out their personal responses to a problem in the public sphere without the consequences of being the teacher in the case. The finding that students' essays reflected a more integrated view of teaching and learning may be linked to the power of completing the case outlines and participating in case discussions. Students entered the case discussions with their own perspectives that were backed up with evidence from the textbook. Throughout the discussion, they were exposed to 40 or more perspectives on what was the problem, what are the possible solutions, and what might be the benefits and consequences of a particular solution. Students' development of more integrated perspectives is consistent with other research reporting the influence of the case method on critical reflection (Harrington et al., 1996; Moje & Wade, 1997). While teacher-in-action cases or videos of live teaching and learning experiences can promote constructivist, collective discussions of pedagogy, the dilemma cases seem even more likely to encourage overt interactions that are conducive to applying educational psychology content (Silverman, et al., 1996).

### **Limitations**

There are some limitations in the current study that are necessary to consider. First, the course was offered in a lecture hall with 65 students. The environment was not ideal or typical of a case method course in educational psychology or teacher education (Merseeth, 1996). A typical or ideal class size is closer to 25 or 30. Smaller class sizes maximize student participation and engagement in case discussions. The facilitator attempted with some success to reduce the problems associated with the anonymity of the lecture hall. For instance, discussions lasted over one hour and approximately 50% of the students spoke during a given case discussion. Another limitation involved the sampling procedure within the course. Most students completed the survey, but only a sample of students participated in interviews or essay analysis. In terms of the interviews, students volunteered as one of many extra credit options to be interviewed and thus the results from the interviews do not necessarily represent all students who were in the course.

There is one further limitation in terms of generalizing the findings to other courses. The

university at which this study was conducted no longer offers undergraduate teaching degrees, so students in the class were in a variety of majors, from psychology and business to content areas in preparation for a graduate degree in teacher education. Therefore, caution must be taken in transferring the results or application of methodology to other educational psychology courses using the case method. Finally, there was no comparison course, so no direct conclusions can be drawn as to whether students in the case-based course learned anything more or different than students would have who received another instructional model, such as primarily lecture or project-based instruction. This study followed an action research model, with particular interest in understanding how the students interpreted the case method and how it impacted their views of teaching and learning. While an experimental design might provide insight on the second question, it is not relevant to the introspective nature of the current study.

### ***Implications for Future Research and Practice***

This study has implications for future studies of the case method in education. It builds on previous research on the impact of the case method on changes in how students understand the role of teaching and learning. The current study, like many in the literature, focused on a single educational psychology class during a single semester. Future research on the case method in educational psychology could involve using the same cases and examine the same student outcomes over several semesters. This would provide stronger evidence of the impact of the cases and provide instructors with valuable feedback on aspects of the case method that are more or less influential to students' thinking about teaching and learning.

These findings also have implications for teacher education programs that specifically struggle with providing appropriate placements for preservice student teachers and more generally respond to the current assault against schools of education. They point to the possibility of engaging students in serious and meaningful discussions about classroom teaching within the college classroom context. Often, programs must compete for limited numbers of schools and mentor teachers and the case method provides a viable option for programs that need to reduce the hours or number of semesters students can physically be in a elementary or secondary school classroom. This would have particular relevance to colleges in rural



areas or small cities where several colleges are offering programs leading to certification. While not intended to replace student teaching or professional field experiences, these results demonstrate the power of effective case discussions in educational psychology courses.

In addition to providing alternative or complimentary options for student field placements, the study has implications for how we teach students about engaging in constructivist education (Anderson, et al, 1995). The case method, as a constructivist approach to teaching educational psychology, not only influenced their views of teaching and learning, but also provided them with a potential instructional approach they may adopt (Bolt, 1998). Students' perceptions and written products point out the impact of constructivist pedagogy in teaching educational psychology and teacher education. This is important because the onset of high stakes testing for student and teacher evaluations could sway the desire to follow to pedagogy of effective instruction back toward a "bag of tricks" approach to teaching and learning.

Case dilemmas that explicitly approach teacher education as "teaching for understanding" may be at odds with the culture of the elementary and secondary schools preoccupied with the requirements of No Child Left Behind. Broadly speaking, we need to prepare our future teachers to be critical thinkers, and case discussions pertaining to the role of high-stakes testing can help our students formulate their perspectives on this controversial and under-examined topic in teacher education (Shulman, Whittaker, & Lew, 2002). Faculty in educational psychology, and schools of education in general, need to define their philosophy of education as one that promotes critical thinking on important issues such as differentiated instruction, appreciation for diversity, and a belief that the society has a responsibility to educate all students. The case method can be a key ingredient toward that end, and continued research on the case method is necessary to further our understanding of its impact.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Interview Protocol**

#### *Demographics*

What program/major are you enrolled in?  
 How old are you?  
 How many educational psychology courses have you taken?  
 Have you used cases in your other classes?

#### *Purpose of Case Method*

What is the purpose of using cases in educational psychology?

#### *Components of Case Method*

Please describe how you prepare for a case discussion.  
 How does the case outline help you prepare for discussion?  
 Describe the case discussion?  
 What do you learn from your peers? The faculty member?  
 How do you approach the case analyses?

#### *Impact of Case Method on Student Learning*

How does the case method relate to actual classroom situations and decision-making?  
 In general, how does the case method help you learn educational psychology?  
 How does the case method compare to more traditional style such as lecturing?  
 What advice would you give students interested in taking an educational psychology class using cases?  
 What advice would you give an instructor interested in using cases in his/her educational psychology course?

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